

face. The exposed skin was devoid of pigmentation and was translucent white. But the iris was black unlike in albinos.

As the young ones started growing, the white female was slower in movements and less aggressive. Its reaction to external stimulus also was rather slow. It always kept its eyelids half closed. Its growth rate was, however, similar to others in the litter. When it weighed 100 gm, one of the males was released in its cage for mating. The female died at the age of 201 days without breeding, and its vagina was imperforate. Autopsy results showed that all its internal organs were normally developed.

Romer (1949), Harrison (1950), Harrison and Lim (1951), Gibson-Hill (1950), Joshee & Kamath (1963) and Rajgopal & Mandal (1965) have reported and reviewed the observations on the occurrence of 'albinism' among commensal rodents. Most of these reports pertain to the genus *Rattus* and one to *Bandicota bengalensis*.

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October 20, 1972. B. D. RANA

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5. MUDALIAR OOTU — A LAST STRONGHOLD FOR THE RARE NILGIRI TAHR

Mudaliar Ootu, a perennial spring, is situated next to an old bungalow in the Western Ghats near Srivilliputhur in Ramnad district, Tamil Nadu.

Mudaliar Ootu is easily accessible from Pudupatti and Srivilliputhur. The hill track which had been well maintained in the past is now eroded by rain. Along the track one can see many birds including red spurfowl and grey junglefowl. It is not uncommon to see Malabar giant squirrels, common and Nilgiri langur, bonnet macaque, mon-goose, mouse deer, hare, elephants and *Varanus* at different altitudes.

During the monsoon water is available throughout the trail but in summer water is restricted to some deep nullahs. Anyhow trekers can quench their thirst after reaching the bungalow at the Mudaliar Ootu.

Mudaliar Ootu Bungalow, surrounded by evergreen trees, is locally well known for its cool atmosphere, scenic beauty, and for the herds of Nilgiri Tahr or Ibex that are found on the peaks adjoining the Bungalow. The neighbouring peaks, Peimalai Mottai, Udumbu Theri and Veilkathanmottai, are covered with an abundant growth of lemon grass and *Phoenix humilis*. The precipitous rocky slopes of these peaks are the favoured haunts of the once abundant Nilgiri Tahr now reduced to a small population owing to excessive shooting. A sixty five year old hunter said that in his forty five years of shooting career he had bagged more than five hundred Nilgiri Tahr and that there are scores of hunters who have shot more than a hundred mainly for the pot. Like all goats the Nilgiri Tahr lives in small herds but the old males are often solitary. If the hunter could reach the herd unnoticed and remain hidden he can shoot down the entire herd. But once they get a glimpse or smell of man, they disappear into the deep valleys. Now-a-days the local hunters use well-trained dogs which sometimes corner the sure-footed animals and the hunters have an easy task of approaching the almost petrified animals and bringing them down unawares. It seems that the once abundant Nilgiri Tahr is fighting its last but vain battle on the precipitous rocky slopes of these hills which are not an impediment to the sure footed local hunters.

While standing on the Veilkathanmottai one can have a bird's eye-view of the surrounding hills. To anyone interested in the preservation of wild life the free movement of domestic cattle throughout the hills will be an unpleasant surprise. The thick forests around Mudaliar Ootu are devoid of big cats. Herdsmen boast of having eradicated by poisoning the food, the big cat population, which was fairly good five years back.

In spite of this vandalism it is still possible to restore the Nilgiri Tahr and other wild life of Mudaliar Ootu area, if entry of cattle is prohibited and all types of hunting stopped. If action is not taken immediately Mudaliar Ootu will lose all its fine animals within five years and it will be populated only by elephants, man, and his domestic animals.

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